

SIX MINUS ONE EQUALS NOTHING : THE ISSUE OF
ASEAN-PACIFIC COOPERATION ON HUMAN
RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT (APC – HRD)

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A characteristic feature of the decision-making process of the Association of Southeast Asian Nation's (ASEAN) governmental organization is that decisions arrived at are usually through consultations and consensus.¹ This is an equivalent of Indonesia's 'bermusyawarah' and 'bermuafakat'. ASEAN's decision-making process thus relies heavily on the concept of 'muafakat' or consensus. As a matter of fact ASEAN has been dependent on this concept of absolute consensus ever since its inception in 1967. Absolute consensus necessitates affirmative participation of all member states before projects could be implemented. A decision-making device as such though enhances the spirit of cooperation as well as preserves organizational cohesion at the same time inhibits decision-making.

Without 'muafakat' or consensus then, there can never be an ASEAN decision. Of late one such case is the ASEAN-Pacific Cooperation on Human Resources Development Project known among ASEAN officials simply by its acronym APC-HRD. Malaysia after being a party to an ASEAN consensus over the issue of APC-HRD decided to retract it at the eleventh hour irritating her major partner as well as the project initiator Indonesia.² Henceforth without 'muafakat' or consensus the said project was placed in moratorium. Enforced unanimity in this case obstructs the implementation of projects deemed necessary for the development of the region.

THE ISSUE OF APC-HRD PROGRAMME

The ASEAN-Pacific Cooperation on Human Resources Development Programme had its genesis at the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference (PMC) after the 17th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting or

¹See also Pushpa Thambipillai and Johan Saravanamuttu, *ASEAN Negotiations Two Insights*, ISEAS, Singapore, 1985.

²KOMPAS, 5 August, 1985.

AMM of July 1984. It was at this meeting in Jakarta that a consensus was reached between ASEAN and her Pacific rim dialogue partners: the United States, Japan, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The consensus reached was aimed at promoting the development of human resources of this region.

Cooperation between ASEAN and the Pacific rim countries known as APC was thus initiated. The context of the APC as agreed to at the Post-Ministerial Conference after the 17th AMM was based on the following purposes:

- a) to exchange views on general economic trend and developments in the Pacific region and,
- b) to identify and develop specific themes for possible cooperation in the region.³

In order to meet the second purpose, it was decided that the initial step would be cooperation in the development of human resources. Human resources development is defined as the "development and utilization of manpower which are best achieved through training, education, research information and scholastic exchange with a view to improving employment and income generation and supporting expanded economic activity."⁴

The objectives listed in the programmes formulated within the framework of APC include:

- a) To contribute to the heightening of awareness and a sense of identity in the participating countries of the Pacific region,
- b) To assist in developing key areas or human resources development based on the participating countries real needs and common interests,
- c) To strengthen existing institutions and programs devoted to human resources development,
- d) To identify and support national and regional needs and priorities, so as to contribute to self-reliance, growth and development,
- e) To provide additional impetus for public and private sector cooperation in support of economic growth in the region and
- f) To facilitate the sharing of experiences among the countries in respect of HRD programmes.⁵

³ ASEAN Secretariat, 17th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting And Post Ministerial Meeting With The Dialogue Countries, Jakarta, 9-12 July, 1984.

⁴ Zakaria Haji Ahmad, "ASEAN And Pan-Pacific Cooperation: The Long Way Ahead" in *Asia - Pacific Community*, Fall 1985.

⁵ *Ibid.*

The Foreign Minister of Indonesia Mochtar Kusumaatmadja who suggested the development of human resources as a specific area to be taken up in APC was appointed as the coordinator of the programme.⁶ Pursuant to Indonesia's earnestness four preparatory meetings were held in Jakarta delegated with the task of laying the groundwork of APC-HRD. These meetings which consisted of representatives of both ASEAN and the five Pacific dialogue countries were held on 14th August 1984; 19th September 1984; 10th December 1984 and 21st January 1985.⁷ These meetings were to prepare a HRD Programme and matrix; a *modus operandi* of HRD and an overview of developments in the region. Such preparations were for the consideration of the Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) on APC-HRD that was to follow. At this point of time, Indonesia was assisted by a consultant from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to provide guidelines on the HRD programme.

The first Senior Officials Meeting on APC-HRD was held in Jakarta on the 28th and 29th of January 1985.⁸ This meeting adopted the 'Policy Direction Paper for the ASEAN - Pacific Human Resources Development Programme' as the key guideline in implementing the APC-HRD. The meeting also agreed that the APC-HRD was to be implemented in 2 stages that being the Immediate Action Programme and the Intermediate Action Programme.⁹

Three more APC-HRD preparatory meetings were held in Jakarta between February and May 1985. The purpose of these preparatory meetings was to prepare the trial recommendations for adoption at the subsequent Senior Officials Meeting on APC-HRD, which was held in Kuala Lumpur on the 25th and 26th June 1985.¹⁰ At this juncture and point of time, just a little above 11 months of supportive and preparatory work Malaysia expressed reservations on the concept and approach of APC-HRD. As a result the 18th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting which followed not long after in Kuala Lumpur between 8th and 10th July 1985 witnessed instead a long drawn battle between Malaysia and Indonesia over the issue of APC-HRD.

⁶ *Berita Buana*, 16 July, 1985.

⁷ Interview with an official of the ASEAN Secretariat.

⁸ *Indonesian Observer*, 13 July, 1985.

⁹ *Kompas*, 13 July, 1985.

¹⁰ *Indonesian Observer*, 13 July, 1985.

RESPONSES

Japan for one is ever willing to join such a consensus and to cooperate positively on the matter since human resources development has been one of the most important areas in Japan's economic and technological assistance towards developing countries.¹¹

As explicitly expressed by Shintaro Abe after the 17th AMM, "In meeting . . . technological challenge it is important that we ensure our people have the education and vocational training to be comfortable with sophisticated technologies and that our social and industrial climates be receptive to technological advances. It is after all our people who will determine future development of the Pacific and it is thus imperative that we promote the development of these 'human resources'.¹²

As far as Japan is concerned ASEAN Pacific cooperation is but an extension of her long-established desire to promote the idea of a 'pacific basin' or a 'pacific community'.¹³ By 'pacific community' is conceived a grouping that includes the United States, Japan, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, ASEAN countries, South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Papua New Guinea as well as the other small Pacific states.¹⁴ A closer look would reveal that though it appears to be a grouping of different political structures it nevertheless is a grouping of market economies and virtually non-communist. Thus from the point of view of the Japanese APC albeit this time an ASEAN initiative may be an initial step toward the realization of her long-established dream of a 'pacific-community'.¹⁵

Japan's interest is also an echo of the United States' objective, that is, the ensurance that ASEAN having paved the way for an ASEAN - Pacific cooperation will remain pro-West. Besides it is strongly believed that Indonesia who in the first instance pushed for human resources development to be taken up as a specific area in APC acted so because of strong United States instigation.¹⁶

¹¹ *The Straits Times*, 2 July, 1985.

¹² ASEAN Secretariat, 17th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting And Post Ministerial Meeting With The Dialogue Countries.

¹³ See also Frances Lai, 'Whither The Pacific Basin Community?' in K.S. Nathan and M. Pathmanathan (eds.), *Trilateralism In Asia*, Antara, Kuala Lumpur, 1986.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 33.

¹⁵ See also Lee Poh Ping, 'Japan's Role In The Pacific Region In The 1980s,' in *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Interview with an official of ASEAN Secretariat.

Australia and New Zealand on the other hand are of the opinion that ASEAN - Pacific cooperation is none other than an inexpensive way of providing assistance to Pacific Island countries. Indeed it is stated in an APC document that "the implementation of such cooperation programs should leave open opportunities for the participation of other Pacific countries particularly South Pacific developing countries at the project level."¹⁷ In other words APC does not exclude underdeveloped Pacific states such as Fiji, Papua New Guinea and others from being involved.

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Of the six ASEAN countries only one expressed reservation that being Malaysia. As a matter of fact Malaysia's last minute 'about face'¹⁸ pending the July 1985 AMM was attributed to the fact that a special Malaysian cabinet sub-committee¹⁹ on ASEAN affairs has not accepted the report prepared by Wisma Putra or Malaysia's Foreign Office which was classified to be 'too pro-APC'. It is suspected that the final arbiter in foreign-policy making that is the Prime Minister himself is said to have since changed his mind.²⁰

The then Malaysian Foreign Minister Tengku Ahmad Rithaudeen (when APC was initiated the Foreign Minister was Ghazali Shafie) justified that Malaysia could not agree to APC-HRD because she fears that ASEAN as a regional grouping is still not economically advanced enough to handle the above-mentioned five Pacific rim countries as a group. Malaysia feared that ASEAN maybe swallowed up by the Pacific Region. Furthermore she is less clear whether the official involvement of ASEAN in APC deliberations will indeed finally lead to regional cooperation on such an extended scale as to envelop the six ASEAN nations on the one hand with the five Pacific rim countries on the other leading to a 6+5 combination.²¹ Malaysia regard a format as such would institutionalise the APC dialogue which she deemed an unwise move. She rather prefer that ASEAN deals with her dialogue partners on a six to one basis.

¹⁷ Mochtar Kusumaatmadja, Opening Address At The Senior Officials Meeting On ASEAN-Pacific Cooperation, Jakarta, 28 January, 1985.

¹⁸ *Bangkok Post*, 9 July, 1985.

¹⁹ *Sinar Harapan*, 8 July, 1985.

²⁰ *The Jakarta Post*, 11 July, 1985.

²¹ "Formula Mahathir Lawan Formula Mochtar" in *Tempo*, 20 July, 1985.

It was further justified that a close economic link forged too early with the five Pacific rim countries would make ASEAN overly dependent on them. Perceptions as such relate in large part to the disparity in economic development among the countries of the Pacific region. Though extensive trading ties exist between them the disparity that exist does not truly allow for interdependence. The differing levels of economic development only result in an asymmetrical relationship.²² In simple terms Malaysia fears the probability of being dominated by the strongest economies of the Pacific area. Malaysian officials further justified that one of ASEAN's founding objective, that being, 'the neutralization of Southeast Asia' would be compromised by any hint that the grouping is moving into a new strategic, economic or military alliance.²³

To some Malaysia's official rationale behind the sudden change as outlined above seemed weak at its best. The imperative question raised at this point is why did it take her that long to object? Why be a party to a consensus but only to retract it after much supportive preparations thereby risking the ASEAN spirit of solidarity and 'musyawarah'? Malaysia's or rather Mahathir Mohamed's inconsistent posture did not only incur the wrath of Indonesia's Mochtar Kusumaatmadja but added to other issues was a serious test of ASEAN solidarity and cohesiveness after 18 years of existence.

As was mentioned earlier Malaysia doubted the 6+5 formula to which the Indonesian Foreign Minister reiterated and surprised its Malaysian counterpart by publicly criticising the existing 6+1 formula. As it stands ASEAN deals with each of the five Pacific rim countries on an individual basis which accounts for the 6+1 formula. Whatever aid and cooperative projects between ASEAN and the Pacific five are negotiated and organised on a bilateral basis. According to Mochtar Kusumaatmadja the existing 6+1 formulation was exhausting, repetitive, involving too much travel (by officials) and therefore good only for tourism.²⁴

As for Malaysia's fear of being dominated it has been counter argued by the Indonesian Foreign Minister who again stressed that the programme of cooperation identified in the APC is non-controversial in nature since it deals with human resources

²² Zakaria Haji Ahmad, "ASEAN And Pan-Pacific Cooperation: The Long Way Ahead".

²³ *The Jakarta Post*, 11 July, 1985.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

development. The APC-HRD programme is to follow a set of guidelines produced during the first Senior Officials Meeting on APC-HRD in Jakarta in which Malaysia was a partner too. Among others,

- a) The basic premise in the proposed ASEAN-Pacific co-operation on human resources development is to embark upon a 'new approach' on human resources development which complements existing approaches at the bilateral and regional levels,
- b) Maximum use should be made of institutions based in ASEAN countries.
- c) Such a programme should involve the participation, interchange and cooperation of both developed and developing countries in the region.
- d) The programme should try to obtain the active involvement of the private sector, academic and training institutions and non-governmental organizations.
- e) Where relevant working links should be developed with other regional and international organization.
- f) Existing arrangements such as the Post-Ministerial Conference, Senior Officials Meeting on ASEAN-Pacific cooperation, the Jakarta HRD meetings and the ASEAN Secretariat should be appropriately utilised to avoid creating new institutions.
- g) The implementation of the ASEAN-Pacific programmes should leave open opportunities for the participation of other Pacific countries at the project level.²⁵

Seven areas of concentration were identified namely:

- a) management and entrepreneurship
- b) science and technology
- c) agriculture, forestry and fisheries
- d) industry
- e) transport and communications
- f) trade and services
- g) research and human resources development planning.²⁶

Malaysia's firm stand and refusal to accept the APC-HRD programme seemed nonetheless to irritate and tax the patience of Indonesia who on the other hand is actually the project initiator. Malaysia's rationale as stated above being nothing but weak excuses seemed only to put weight to the contention that ASEAN Foreign Minister's Meetings now seem to be comparatively dull affairs highlighting nothing but national differences only.

²⁵ *The Indonesian Times*, 13 July, 1985.

²⁶ *Indonesian Observer*, 13 July, 1985.

²⁷ Murugesu Pathmanathan and David Lazarus, *Winds of Change The Mahathir Impact on Malaysia's Foreign Policy*, Eastview Productions, Kuala Lumpur, 1984.

Viewed in this context Malaysia's (or rather Mahathir Mohamed's) last minute about face seemed aimed at dampening Indonesia's conscious push for a higher profile in international affairs. Indonesia is geared to pursue an activist role in the Pacific that is more in keeping with its massive size while at the same time ASEAN-Pacific cooperation harbours the view that it can also be a vehicle for 'south-south' cooperation. Interesting enough Malaysia's foreign policy led by Mahathir Mohamed²⁷ is also geared to champion the interests of 'dwarf' nation-states within the realm of 'south-south' cooperation.

Besides initiating the ASEAN-Pacific cooperation on human resources development project the Indonesian Minister also has his own pet project — that is to put the Vietnamese and the Americans on better terms with a view eventually to resuming full diplomatic relations. Thus the atmosphere of the 18th AMM in Kuala Lumpur seemed clouded by the Indonesian Foreign Minister's own pet diplomatic projects²⁸ and did not seem particularly enthusiastic about Malaysia's 'proximity-talks' proposal as regards the Kampuchean problem. Mochtar Kusumaatmadja was keener to talk about his role as ASEAN's chosen interlocutor with Vietnam.

CONCLUSION

During the 18th AMM of July 1985 a year after the APC-HRD programme was launched Malaysia, the one and only member of ASEAN, objected. Because of the Malaysia's reservation (6-1) the APC-HRD programme did not leave the ground. ASEAN's decision-making process as was mentioned earlier relies heavily on 'muafakat' or consensus so without it there can never be an ASEAN decision which accounts for six minus one equals nothing. Nevertheless as a face-saving device the HRDP was launched but only for projects listed under the 'Immediate Action Programme'. Thirty-four projects which had already been approved (at the time of approval not classified as APC-HRD) could be implemented immediately as facilities and staff are already in place and no further funding are required. Another thirty-nine projects to be included in the immediate action programme are still open for implementation subject to availability of funds. While a list of proposals under the APC-HRD intermediate action programme

²⁸Rodney Tasker, "Stealing the thunder" in *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 18 July, 1985.

containing thirty-six proposals still requires further study and consultations. Malaysia's reservation lingered on at the 19th AMM of June 1986 in Manila henceforth continually retard the fulfilment of the programme. At the 19th AMM the Ministers agreed "that 32 APC projects already initiated with dialogue partner funding should proceed, but that they will not carry the name "APC" nor will any new projects be started for two years."²⁹ A postponement of two years in ASEAN parlance meant the end of the programme and true enough this was indicated in Mochtar Kusumaatmadja's opening statement at the 20th AMM of June 1987 in Singapore.

"It has been three years since ASEAN launched the widely heralded initiative under the aegis of the ASEAN-Pacific Co-operation scheme. The first tier of this cooperation, namely the exchange of views on the trends and economic developments in the Pacific has been undertaken regularly in the framework of the AMM/PMC. Implementation of the second tier of this co-operation, however, has not proceeded as expected, because the completion of the 23 out of the 34 projects under the APC-HRD Immediate Action Programme is left without the necessary follow-up action. If this state of affairs is allowed to persist without remedy, I am afraid that the momentum for this initiative will soon be lost."³⁰

²⁹ ASEAN Secretariat, 19th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting And Post Ministerial Meeting With The Dialogue Countries, Manila, 23-24 June 1986.

³⁰ ASEAN Secretariat, Statements By The ASEAN Foreign Ministers At ASEAN Ministerial Meetings 1967-1987, Jakarta, 1987.